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MISCELLANEA

PSALM CXXXIII.

INTERNAL evidence, as suggested by the tenor of the first verse, and supported by the literal meaning of the word בָּנִים "brothers," would seem to warrant the conclusion, that this psalm was composed during the short reign of Aristobulus II, to soothe the feelings of Hyrcanus II, now High Priest, whom an ambitious brother had supplanted on the throne.

(a) *History.*—When Queen Salome Alexandra, widow and successor of Alexander Jannaeus, had died after nine years of beneficent rule, she bequeathed the throne to Hyrcanus II, her eldest son, a man virtuous enough, yet hardly fit to govern a state, and in troublous times. His younger brother, Aristobulus II, violent, ambitious, and recklessly courageous, prepared himself to challenge the succession.

Hardly had Salome expired, when Aristobulus, at the head of a hired army and Sadducean followers, marched upon Jerusalem to dethrone his brother. The two brothers, each at the head of his army, met at Jericho, where they fought a decisive battle. Hyrcanus was defeated and fled to Jerusalem. The greater number of his troops having gone over to his brother Aristobulus, the victor now advanced upon Jerusalem, attacked and took the temple; and Hyrcanus was obliged to lay down his arms.

The two brothers met again, this time for peace; and signed a covenant in the temple by which Aristobulus, as the more capable, shall be king, whilst Hyrcanus was to remain high priest. This agreement was ratified by the marriage of Alexander, son of Aristobulus, to Alexandra, daughter of Hyrcanus¹.

(b) *Custom.*—The prevailing custom in Judaea up to the time of King Josiah's successor was, that both the king and the high priest were anointed on their succession to office—though the former only when the right of succession was disputed (see *T. B. Horayoth*, f. 11 b). From that time, however—Josiah having hid away the sacring oil, among other important relics (*ibid.*, f. 12 a)—neither of them was anointed; but the king came to the throne by coronation, and the high priest to office by the rite of investiture. Such unanointed

¹ See Josephus, Book XIII, c. xvi and Book XIV, c. i; Graetz, vol. II, c. iii.

מְרוּבָה בְּנֵדִים (see *Siphra*, *Lev.*, par. 79); and the writer of this psalm speaks of the pontifical investiture in his poetic effusion, as the “oil descending (upon him) by his garments” *עַל־פִּי מִדּוֹתָיו*, i. e. the garments performing the function formerly accomplished by the unction.

(c) *Phrases, or second meanings.*—הַרְאֵשׁ, “the head” (second verse), stands for the king, the head of the state; whilst הַבָּנֶן (translated “the beard,” really means the sheikh, the elder, and stands for the high priest. ²בְּנֵי is but a play upon the word בְּנֵי, to complete the metaphor—and as if to prevent a misunderstanding, the psalmist immediately follows it up by בָּנֵי אַהֲרֹן, “the elder of the house of Aaron”! to explain that he meant by בְּנֵי not a *beard*, but an *Elder*.

I would also add that the verb שָׂרֵךְ, omitted in the opening sentence of verse 2, is to be understood thus פְּשַׁעַטְנָה הַטוֹב (שָׂרֵךְ) עַל.

(d) *Climatic condition.*—Palestine, in the summer, has no rain, but dew. Now whether dew be the result of evaporation or radiation, the fact is undisputed, that (Palestine apart) dew is more abundant shortly after rain, but very much less so after a long spell of dry weather. Whence, then, come the heavy abundant dews of *dry* Palestine?

The psalmist here would seem to say that they are supplied by Mount Hermon.

Mount Hermon, the great mountain, the culminating point of the anti-Libanus range, runs up to 9,000 feet, the top of which is covered with perpetual snow.

Some of this snow the hot Syrian sun converts into vapour, which, floating in the higher regions of the atmosphere, and driven by the wind, is attracted by the dry peaks of the הַרְרֵי צִיּוֹן (“Mountains of Zion,” are used here in a wider geographical terminology for the mountains of the whole of Palestine). There, gripped by the cold of the night, these vapours are condensed into minute globules and descend upon the soil of Palestine in the form of dew.

(e) *Comparison* (full of local colour).—The relationship between “Hermon” and the “Mounts of Zion” thus brings health and fertility upon Palestine; so, too (hopes the psalmist), will the unity subsisting between the two brothers—the king, who, as towering higher, might be compared to “Hermon,” and the high priest, who as officiating on the temple mount is the glory of the “mountains of Zion”—may produce a like effect, to bring the blessing upon Palestine, as a whole.

¹ בְּנֵי—by. Cf. Exod. xxxiv. 27 and Deut. xvii. 10, 11.

² See Isa. vii. 20 and ix. 13, 14.

(f) *Object.*—To promote amity, and preserve the peace. To soothe the wounded feelings of Hyrcanus—to mollify the sore that it might not break out again—by telling him, within the precincts of the temple, that (in the eyes of the nation) the one dignity is as great as the other; he has therefore, lost nothing; he has nothing to grieve about, nothing to resent, and nothing to make him break the covenanted peace.

TRANSLATION.

- (1) Behold, how good and pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity!
- (2) As the precious oil *descends* upon the head (i. e. the king¹), It
descends upon the elder (i. e. the high priest), the elder of the house
of Aaron¹; That descends (upon him) by his garments².
- (3) *Their unity*, Like the dew of Hermon
That cometh down upon the mountains of Zion³;
Where the Lord commanded the blessing⁴.
Even life for evermore.

S. FYNE.

JEWS IN ROME, 1704.

THERE is a curious account of how certain Jewish families in Italy, after their “conversion” had been made secure by public baptism, merged with the Italian *noblesse*, in the following extract. It would be interesting if we could glean more information on such a subject, as it would bear directly upon the question how much the Jews were disliked as a race and not on account of their religion before the eighteenth century in Italy. The extract is taken from page 300 of the “Journal” of Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury (died 1717), who kept a full diary of interesting observations during his travels from 1700–1706, the MS. of which, a well-written book, is now among the MSS. of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry at Montagu House.

1704, 13th March. ‘This morning there was a great ceremony at St. Peters which I did not see. These Jews of Leghorn, a man, his wife, and daughter were made Christians. They were baptized by the Pope, confirmed by a Bishop and communicated by the Pope at his own Mass. The Queen of Poland [Marie de la Grange d’Arquien, widow of John Sobieski] was godmother and Cardinal Ottoboni stood for the Great Duke. Here they will have them

¹ See par. (c).

² See par. (b).

³ See par. (d).

⁴ See par. (e).